

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 348 854

FL 020 474

AUTHOR Heining-Boynton, Audrey L.
TITLE FLES Program Evaluation: Rationale and Procedural Design.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 16p.; In: Acting on Priorities: A Commitment to Excellence. Dimension: Languages '90. Report of Southern Conference on Language Teaching; see FL 020 470.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Accountability; Elementary Education; Evaluation Criteria; Evaluation Methods; *Evaluation Needs; Feedback; *FLES; Formative Evaluation; *Program Evaluation; Second Language Instruction; *Second Language Programs; Summative Evaluation

ABSTRACT

Evaluation of foreign languages in the elementary school (FLES) programs is needed to provide feedback (descriptive data about a school's offerings) and accountability (program accomplishments). Thorough program evaluation verifies both a district's thoughtful, written philosophy of foreign language education and local goals. Some FLES program evaluation instruments have already been developed. If schools decide to create their own instruments, they need to first provide for both formative and summative assessment, then consider these issues in evaluation design: focus of the evaluation; evaluation model; information collection; data analysis and interpretation; data management; and evaluation of the instrument itself. Evaluators must inform educators that it will produce descriptive program information and documentation, to minimize intimidation, and data collection should be as streamlined as possible. Each district must determine the most appropriate way to analyze and interpret its program evaluation data. A FLES teacher or supervisor should coordinate the effort, and the instrument should be reviewed annually to learn if it is reporting and measuring what is intended. Results should be made known first among teachers, curricular and program improvement should be encouraged, and outcomes should be disseminated to the community. A brief bibliography is included. (MSE)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Frank
Medley

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

☐ Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official
OERI position or policy.

4

FLES PROGRAM EVALUATION: RATIONALE AND PROCEDURAL DESIGN

Audrey L. Heining-Boynton
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

The number of Foreign Language in the Elementary School (FLES) programs continues to increase across our country. Several state legislatures support strong FLES requirements, with other states following suit (Clark, 1988). Approximately twenty percent of all elementary schools nationwide currently offer FLES (Rhodes & Oxford, 1988). An additional indication of the growth, importance, and support of early foreign language learning was the inclusion of FLES in the ACTFL 1989 National Conference on Professional Priorities.

With the strong backing FLES is receiving, one would think that advocates would be ecstatic. Many FLES supporters, though, are guardedly optimistic about the future. These advocates watched FLES flourish in the fifties, and they also witnessed its virtual disappearance by the late 1960s. They understand that earlier FLES efforts lacked the various components necessary for enduring, successful programs. One synthesis of the literature reports six recurring reasons for discontinuation of FLES programs in the fifties and sixties:

1. lack of qualified teachers

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ED348854

FL 620 474

64 AUDREY L. HEINING-BOYNTON

2. unrealistic and/or inappropriate goals and objectives
3. incompatible pedagogy
4. lack of articulation
5. lack of parental support
6. lack of homework, grades, and evaluation (Heining-Boynton, 1990a).

If FLES programs had been periodically evaluated, perhaps weaknesses could have been diagnosed and corrected.

Many definitions of evaluation exist. One well-known definition states that evaluation is "the process of determining to what extent the educational objectives are actually being realized" (Tyler, 1950, 69). Another highly-accepted definition describes evaluation as "the assessment of merit or worth" (Scriven, 1967; Stufflebeam, 1974). Therefore, the "goodness" or "badness" of an educational program encompasses more than student test scores. Its "merit or worth" also hinges on the observations, judgments, opinions, and impressions of participants and members of the community.

Foreign language education, like other content areas on the curriculum, has been so concerned with measurement of student performance that overall program performance has been relatively overlooked. Nationally, FLES supporters are attempting to remedy the situation. For example, one of the six priorities listed in the FLES strand of the 1989 ACTFL National Conference on Professional Priorities is evaluation (Met & Rhodes, 1990). Although some may feel recommending FLES program evaluation restates the obvious, the fact remains that only a small percentage of schools conduct a periodic assessment of elementary school foreign language offerings¹.

The purpose of this article is to discuss the importance of program evaluation, beginning with a rationale for the process.

Next, is a discussion of the step-by-step procedures and approaches of evaluation design. Finally, this article will provide suggestions for practical applications of an educational design so that FLES teachers, coordinators, and/or principals can develop and conduct a program evaluation that will yield valuable information for future change and innovation.

RATIONALE FOR FLES PROGRAM EVALUATION

Often in education, curricular programs begin or change with no plan to judge the effectiveness of instruction. "New Math" replaced the "old math," which has since been superseded by "Math Our Way"; the "whole language" approach currently occupies a position of favor among numerous language arts teachers while phonics is *démodé*. How do we know that current practices are improvements over former ones? Commonly, schools utilize the outcomes of standardized tests and compare the students' scores from the current year to those of years past. Teachers, administrators, and parents frequently judge a program's success by the rise or fall of such test scores. School districts rarely develop local instruments that specifically assess a program's effectiveness apart from student achievement. Standardized tests do exist for FLES students, but they are not as widespread as in other content areas.² Also, standardized tests measure student achievement; they do not furnish specific descriptive information concerning the curriculum and its teachers.

Any educational program can be rated solely on student achievement, but that approach is narrow in scope. Brinkerhoff et al. (1983, 16) state that program evaluation is used to "find a problem, solve a problem, provide ongoing information, or judge ongoing program success." Additionally, program evaluation involves data collection for the purpose of justifying the continuation or termination of a program. For the purpose of this discussion, the rationale for program evaluation comprises two broad categories: feedback and accountability.

Feedback. Program evaluation yields necessary descriptive data about a school's FLES offerings. The data feedback indicates curriculum strengths that can be enhanced as well as areas that require improvement. Such knowledge allows those in charge of FLES programs to make informed decisions regarding changes and innovations. A yearly survey of FLES teachers, administrators, elementary classroom teachers, children, and parents, offers a concrete report card of the program. The raw data show levels of satisfaction from one year to the next, giving FLES planners a numerical, longitudinal assessment. The numbers collected over a period of years also impart a strong defense for the inevitable justification of program continuance.

Accountability. Gone are the days of unquestioned spending in education. Programs must not only justify expenses; they must also justify their very existence. Even though states today are mandating early foreign language study, the intelligent FLES educator and advocate understands that tomorrow's legislator may not be as supportive. As funding comes and goes, the enduring curriculum is one that substantiates its effectiveness. The way to document program accomplishments is through evaluation.

A thorough program evaluation verifies a school district's thoughtful, written philosophy of foreign language education. That philosophy incorporates the latest rationale for articulated foreign language instruction, beginning in the elementary school and sequentially progressing to the middle and high schools (Fuchsen, 1989, 4). A prominent, convincing FLES rationale assists in educating all elementary classroom teachers, administrators, and community members.

FLES program evaluation also produces a verification of local goals, to discover if they are in line with our national goals. One reason FLES failed in the past was due to unrealistic goals; learners and their parents thought FLES children would become bilingual. With the minimal amount of time spent on instruction, bilingualism was an impossible outcome. Current national FLES goals take into account the realities of time spent yearly on instruction. Hence, no present FLES goal professes to impart fluency, but rather emphasizes an appreciation of culture with an introduction to the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing the language (Rhodes and Schreiberstein, 1983, 10).

To summarize the rationale for FLES program evaluation, one FLES teacher/coordinator provides the following reasons for FLES program evaluation:

1. to have a better understanding of our program's positive and negative impact;
2. to make decisions about the growth and development of the program while identifying areas to change or improve;
3. to open communication with evaluators;

68 AUDREY L. HEINING-BOYNTON

4. to maintain accountability for effective use of resources;
5. to meet the expectations of the system.³

EVALUATION DESIGN: PROCEDURES AND APPROACHES

Some school districts may choose to use FLES program evaluation instruments that have already been written and tested, such as the FLES Program Evaluation Inventory (Heining-Boynton, 1991). If FLES teachers, curriculum planners, or administrators decide to create their own program evaluation instruments, they need to be aware of factors controlling program evaluation design. First, the design should provide for both formative and summative evaluation. In formative program evaluation, information is gathered to be used for program improvement. Summative evaluation assesses the program's worth (Brinkerhoff et al., 1983, 38; Fitz-Gibbon & Morris, 1978, 11).

When devising a program evaluation, the next issues to consider are design functions and their accompanying tasks. Important functions and tasks include:

1. the focus of the evaluation
2. evaluation model
3. information collection
4. analysis and interpretation of the data
5. data management
6. instrument evaluation (Brinkerhoff et al., 1983, 43-45).

The focus of an evaluation comprises many issues such as the purpose of the evaluation, who will be affected by the results, the questions asked, and the potential for the evaluation's success (Brinkerhoff et al., 1983, 43). For many, the focus represents the greatest hurdle that a program evaluation poses. Many educators mistrust the intentions of program appraisal. Teachers may fear for their jobs, worrying that the data collected will be misinterpreted and/or misused. FLES teachers are not immune to these feelings. The effective program evaluator explains to the FLES teachers that the results of the evaluation survey will document program strengths as well as point to areas needing improvement. Although no one enjoys being criticized, FLES teachers need to understand that submitting themselves and their program to scrutiny leads to a better program.

Along with explaining to FLES teachers the purpose of a program evaluation and how they personally will be affected, an administrator devising a survey must pay close attention to the questions asked. Questions such as "Does FLES in your school reinforce the elementary school curriculum?", "Do the parents support the study of foreign language in the elementary school?", and "Do the students receive grades?" address contemporary and historical FLES issues that must be surveyed (Heining-Boynton, 1990b & 1991). A less-than-thorough exploration and development of the evaluation's questions will yield an incomplete picture of current program conditions.

Also requiring attention is the formation of an evaluation model. These paradigms are developed through the use of criteria such as the Joint Committee Standards, or the Sanders and Nafziger Criteria (Brinkerhoff et al., 1983, 70). An evaluation model lists the progression of

tasks that a program assessment entails. The Joint Committee Standards, for example, enumerate fifteen steps to be taken when devising an assessment, beginning with audience identification and ending with objective reporting.

Collecting information necessitates deciding how much data to gather. The FLES evaluation coordinator determines whether all participants are surveyed or if a sample of the population would yield ample descriptive data. To be taken into consideration also is the cost of administering the assessment. Some large school districts find surveying an entire population cost-prohibitive.

Other measurement issues involve the determination of validity and reliability of the instrument. Validity is "the degree to which an instrument measures what it purports to measure" (Borg & Gall, 1983, 275). Reliability is "the level of internal consistency or stability of a measuring device over time" (Borg & Gall, 1983, 281). To establish validity for a FLES evaluation survey, each questionnaire item is analyzed to assure consistency with the goals and objectives of the program. Program evaluators accomplish this by engaging a variety of professionals to critique the survey. They check to insure that the results will give a fair picture of a school's FLES offerings. Designing a FLES questionnaire for reliability requires clear directions, only one interpretation of an item, and the elimination of dual stems (e.g., FLES is fun and I am learning.).⁴

Analysis and interpretation of data engage the evaluator in developing procedures for collecting and coding the questionnaires as well as for selecting the methods to analyze and interpret the findings. Without adequate coding, FLES coordinators in large districts will not be able to identify individual schools or grade levels,

and they will be unable to correct any weaknesses that might be present.

Managing the data requires decisions regarding who will tabulate, report, and store the data. Small districts call on the program coordinator; large districts require numerous personnel to assist in the counting, dissemination, and archiving of the responses.

Finally, the evaluation instrument and its process must be appraised to ascertain the effectiveness of the instrument as well as its administration. A pilot test aids the evaluators in identifying potential problems.⁵

EVALUATION DESIGN: PRACTICAL APPLICATION

FLES program evaluation possesses unique characteristics when considering the six functions of evaluation design (Brinkerhoff et al., 1983). First, FLES evaluators must make it clear that the survey will produce descriptive program information and documentation. If FLES educators have never been involved in a program assessment, they may be concerned, intimidated, or frightened by the process. They need to understand the intentions of those distributing the evaluation and how the findings will be used.

FLES evaluation design should allow data collection to be as streamlined as possible. Forms that are brief allow for higher numbers of returned questionnaires. FLES evaluations should be completed in ten minutes or less. The format "Strongly Agree (SA)," "Agree (A)," Disagree (D)," "Strongly Disagree (SD)," affords the respondent a rapid method for giving input, as does rating on a linear scale of one to five or one to ten. These formats allow the raw data to be scored and compiled more quickly than with

open-ended essay type questions.⁶ Insuring anonymity also produces a higher rate of return with more frank and honest responses. Another factor in FLES evaluation design to be determined is who the assessors will be. FLES program coordinators net the most complete account of a program's achievements when they survey a broad spectrum of individuals. It is suggested therefore, that FLES teachers, administrators, elementary classroom teachers, children, and parents supply input regarding their judgments, attitudes, feelings, and impressions of the FLES offerings.

Each school district must determine the most appropriate way to analyze and interpret its FLES program's evaluation data. In most cases, reporting the results as averages of a linear scale or in percentages of respondents who "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," or "strongly disagree" gives the most useful, understandable summary of the gathered data.

Managing the administration of FLES program evaluation requires a FLES teacher or supervisor to coordinate the effort. FLES teachers should be given copies of the instrument in September in order that they become familiar with how the program will be assessed. The evaluation should take place in the spring, and the data tabulated as quickly as possible in order to provide feedback in a timely fashion. The FLES evaluation coordinator of a large school district arranges for individuals to assist with the circulation, collection, and tabulation of the forms.

Finally, the FLES evaluation instrument should be reviewed yearly to learn if it is reporting and measuring what is intended. The FLES evaluation administrator solicits comments from a sample of respondents, asking for

their opinions and suggestions concerning the questionnaires.

FLES program evaluation instruments are already available for use by schools which do not have the time, resources, or desire to initiate their own. The FLES Program Evaluation Inventory (FPEI) is an example of a tested instrument available to schools (Heining-Boynton, 1991). The FPEI offers five different forms to collect data from FLES teachers, administrators, elementary classroom teachers, children, and parents. The FPEI bases the five-part survey on historical as well as contemporary FLES issues and concerns. The FPEI includes items that explore whether FLES programs of the nineties are avoiding the shortcomings of the past. The surveys probe fundamentals such as the qualifications of the FLES teachers, the appropriateness of program goals, objectives, and pedagogy, and the existence of parental support, articulation, homework, grades, and evaluation. Contemporary concerns such as workload and at-risk students round out the focus of the instruments.

An imperative step in a FLES program evaluation plan involves widespread dissemination of the findings. The FLES teachers review the report first, and the FLES coordinator encourages them to institute curricular changes and innovations based on the tallies. Elementary classroom teachers, administrators, the school board, and community also need to be apprised of the outcomes. This can be done through school and local newspapers. The more publicity about strong FLES offerings, the better! The attention will help to insure a long-lived, exciting FLES program.

CONCLUSION

The judged effectiveness of an educational program depends on more than the level of student achievement. Program assessment provides information based on observations and perceptions of teachers, administrators, students, and parents that attest to the merit or worth of the offerings. It is crucial for the continued life and well-being of FLES to complete timely, thorough, and organized self-evaluations. Effective program appraisals contribute vital knowledge about the health of FLES as well as concrete documentation of successes. Administrators, school board members, and others in decision-making positions must frequently be made aware of a district's outstanding FLES programs. The goal is to insure a permanent place in elementary school curricula for foreign language study.

END NOTES

¹ For example, in North Carolina where state-mandated K-6 foreign language instruction exists, only one district currently conducts a yearly formal program evaluation.

² The American Association of Teachers of French makes available a standardized proficiency exam that provides data on how students perform compared to national norms.

³ This list was developed by Carol Orringer, FLES teacher and coordinator with the Chapel Hill-Carrboro (NC) City Schools.

⁴ Borg and Gall (1983) and Brinkerhoff et al. (1983) provide a good introduction on how to establish validity and reliability.

⁵ Brinkerhoff et al. (1983 47-49) offer an extensive checklist for critiquing a survey design.

⁶ See Heining-Boynton (1991) for suggestions on format and survey questions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Borg, Walter R. and Meredith D. Gall. *Educational Research: An Introduction*. New York, NY: Longman, 1983.
- Brinkerhoff, Robert D., Dale M. Brethower, Terry Hluchyj, and Jeri Ridings Nowakowski. *Program Evaluation: A Practitioner's Guide for Trainers and Educators*.
- Clark, Margaret. "State Involvement in FLES Increases." *FLES News* 1, iii (1988): 1-7.
- Curtain, Helena & Carol Ann Pesola. *Languages and Children, Making the Match*. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1988.
- Fitz-Gibbon, Carol Taylor, and Lynn Lyons Morris. *How to Design a Program Evaluation*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1978.

Fuchsen, Marianne. "Starting Language Early: A Rationale." *FLES News* 2, iii (1989): 1, 6-7.

Heining-Boynton, Audrey L. "Using FLES History to Plan for the Present and Future." *Foreign Language Annals* 23 (1990a): 503-09.

"The Development and Testing of the FLES Program Evaluation Inventory". *Modern Language Journal* 74 (1990b): 432-439.

"The FLES Program Evaluation Inventory (FPEI)." *Foreign Language Annals* 24 (1991): 193-202.

Lipton, Gladys. *Practical Handbook to Elementary Foreign Language Programs*. Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook, 1988.

Met, Myriam and Nancy Rhodes. "Elementary School Foreign Language Instruction-Priorities for the 1990s". *Foreign Language Annals* 23 (1990): 433-443.

Rhodes, Nancy and Rebecca Oxford. "Foreign Language in Elementary and Secondary Schools: Results of a National Survey". *Foreign Language Annals* 21 (1988): 51-69.

Rhodes, Nancy and Audrey Schreiberstein. *Foreign Language in the Elementary School: A Practical Guide*. Washington DC: CAL, 1983.

Scriven, M. "The Methodology of Evaluation," in R. E. Stake, ed., *Curriculum Evaluation*. AERA Monograph Series on Evaluation, No. 1. Chicago, IL: Rand McNally, 1967.

Stufflebeam, D.L. *Meta-Evaluation*. Occasional Paper Series, The Evaluation Center, Western Michigan University, December 1974.

Tyler, Robert. *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1950.